

# INTERNATIONAL Herald Tribune

## Dakar Rally organizers deny reports of terror threats

**The Associated Press**

The Dakar Rally will go ahead as planned despite reports of terrorist threats.

Organizers denied reports in two local newspapers that French authorities had warned them of dangers in Mali, where the Salafist Group for Call and Combat, an Algerian insurgency movement, is known to operate.

Dakar Rally director Etienne Lavigne said Tuesday that French authorities had raised security concerns without evoking specific threats, however.

"We are aware of the global security context in the region, but there is no precise threat to the Dakar route," Lavigne said. "If there were one, we would adapt and change the route."

Race organizers, who have changed routes twice in the past for security reasons, have been in contact with the Foreign Ministry, French embassies and authorities in the countries the rally would cross.

Organizers were continuing preparations for this year's rally, which begins in Lisbon, Portugal, on Jan. 6 and ends in Dakar, Senegal, on Jan. 21.

The rally takes drivers through tough African terrain in Morocco, Mauritania and Mali before reaching Dakar. Details of the itinerary are to be announced Thursday.

Lavigne said the Foreign Ministry had raised concerns about Mali, and that he was in contact with Malian officials.

"I didn't get a red light," Lavigne said.

The French Foreign Ministry said it had discussed security issues with rally organizers. Ministry spokesman Jean-Baptiste Mattei would not provide details or name potentially vulnerable zones.

"There are security conditions that in some places are a bit uncertain," Mattei said.

At a preparatory meeting with rally organizers, ministry officials "gave them some information and our perception of security conditions in the zone," Mattei said.

He said the risk analysis was based on confidential intelligence and reports.

Lavigne spoke of an "uncertain risk in an uncertain zone," unlike the precise threats in 2000 and 2004, when routes were changed. In 2000, an alleged terrorist threat forced organizers to airlift the entire race from Niger to Libya.

The GSPC, which has aligned itself with al-Qaida, began in Algeria in 1998 at the height of an Islamic insurgency, formed from dissidents breaking away from the radical Armed Islamic Group. Today, the GSPC is the only structured Islamic insurgency movement still known to be operating in Algeria.

A branch operating off the southern Algerian border, trafficking in arms and goods, has been blamed for deadly raids in Mauritania and Mali.

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